DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 951 FL 022 837

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TITLE	Dropout Intervention and Language Minority Youth. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, New York, N.Y.; Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-FL-95-06
PUB DATE	Mar 95
CONTRACT	RR93002010
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/CLL, 1118 22nd Street N.W., Washington, DC 20037.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Dropout Prevention; *English (Second Language); Extracurricular Activities; High Risk Students; High Schools; High School Students; *Hispanic Americans; *Limited English Speaking; Mentors; Middle Schools; *Program Descriptions; Second Language Learning; Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS	California Partnership Academies; Coca Cola Valued Youth Program; ERIC Digests; Language Minorities; Project Adelante NJ

ABSTRACT

This digest describes three programs for middle and high school language minority students at risk of dropping out of school. Two of the programs are geared toward limited-English-proficient Hispanic youth, and the third, a vocational program, involves African-American students as well. The first program described is the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, which aims to help Hispanic middle and high school students achieve academic success and improve their language skills. In this program, middle and high school students are paired with elementary school students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. The program's philosophy is that the tutors, by being placed in positions of responsibility, will improve their self esteem and academic performance. The goals of the second program, Project Adelante, are to improve the high school graduation rate of Hispanic students, increase their opportunities for college admission, and increase the number who enter the teaching profession. The California Partnership Academies Program represents a three-way partnership among state, local school districts, and supporting businesses. Goals are to provide academic and vocational training to disadvantaged students and to decrease youth unemployment. (Contains nine references and three program contacts.) (VWL)

ED 379 951

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Digest

March 1995

(EDO-FL-95-06)

Dropout Intervention and Language Minority Youth

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Youth from non-English-language backgrounds are 1.5 times more likely to leave school before high school graduation than those from English-language backgrounds (Cárdenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992). High dropout rates among students from economically disadvantaged and non-English-speaking backgrounds are among the major concerns of middle and high school educators in the United States. Though dropout rates have declined overall in recent years, especially among Blacks and Whites, the trend for Hispanic students is quite the opposite. According to the Census Bureau, in 1992 roughly 50% of Hispanics ages 16 to 24 dropped out of high school, up from 30% in 1990 (GAO, 1994).

By the year 2010, Hispanics are expected to be the largest minority group in the United States, making up 21% of the population (OERI, 1993). Thus, the increase in dropout rates among Hispanic high school students is cause for growing concern. Various dropout prevention programs have emerged as one response.

This digest describes three programs for middle and high school students at risk of dropping out of school. The first two programs are specifically geared toward limited-English-proficient Hispanic youth. The third, a vocational program, involves African-American students as well.

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

Developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association in Texas, Coca-Cola Valued Youth Programs (VYP) have been implemented in 60 schools in 8 states. The goals are to help Hispanic middle and high school students achieve academic success and improve their language skills. Other goals are to strengthen students' perceptions of themselves and school and to form school-home-community partnerships to increase the level of support for these students (Cárdenas et al., 1992).

Middle and high school students are paired as tutors with elementary school students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. Tutors are paid minimum wage for their work. The program's philosophy is that the tutors, by being placed in paid positions of responsibility and treated as adults, will improve their self-esteem and academic performance. As one tutor claimed, "When I'm helping these kids, I'm helping myself. I'm learning things when I'm tutoring them" (Claiborne, 1994). In turn, the student being tutored will grow both academically and personally under the attention of the tutor and will be encouraged to remain in school until graduation.

Cross-age tutoring, the main component of the VYP, takes place at the elementary school one hour a day, four days a week; on the fifth day, the tutors take a class on effective tutoring strategies (Robledo & Rivera, 1990). In addition to conducting the tutoring sessions, tutors must adhere to the employee guidelines of their host school and report to a teacher coordinator, who monitors and evaluates their progress. Student tutors also attend classes in English as a second language and content areas.

Field trips, conducted at least twice a year, are designed to broaden students' horizons by exposing them to cultural and professional possibilities in their communities. A student recognition component serves to instill a sense of self-worth in both tutors and tutees. This takes the form of a celebratory lunch or dinner, media attention, or presentation of merit awards for student efforts to stay in school and help others do the same. Finally, adults who are successful in their field, have the same language and cultural background as the students, and have overcome similar obstacles act as role models and provide guidance to both the tutors and the tutees.

Project Adelante

Project Adelante, established in 1988 at Kean College, NJ, is currently implemented in three New Jersey school districts. The project's goals are to improve the high school graduation rate of Hispanic students (especially those still learning English), increase their opportunities for college admission, and increase the number who enter the teaching profession (CAL, 1994).

Hispanic middle and high school students receive academic instruction, career and personal counseling, peer tutoring, and mentoring by Hispanic professionals. This takes place on the Kean College campus during an intensive five-week Summer Academy and at Saturday Academies during the academic year. Students usually enter the program in middle school and are encouraged to remain with it until they complete high school.

Academic courses include English as a second language, science, and math. Class size is kept at around 15 students. Teachers are free to design courses that are interesting and appropriate for the students, to use both English and Spanish in the classroom and in social settings, and to adjust their class schedules as needed to accommodate special projects or field trips.

Personal and career counseling are key aspects of the program. Program counselors, like teachers, come from participating schools and participate in all events, so they know the students well. Students meet regularly with their counselors-in one-on-one and small-group settings and take a full course taught by a counselor, which covers social and academic issues. The counselors also sponsor daytime and evening sessions for the parents to come to the campus and discuss issues selected by the parents.

Peer tutoring furthers Adelante's goal of encouraging students to enter the teaching profession. Tutors are Hispanic and African-American high school juniors and seniors and Kean College freshmen and sophomores, many of whom are former Adelante students. Each tutor is assigned a small group of students to meet with, work with in class, and interact with in written dialogue journals. The tutors serve as role models. At the same time, tutors receive intensive and ongoing training. They learn the tasks and responsibilities of teaching and are often inspired to pursue teaching careers.

The mentoring program involves a collaboration with HISPA, a service organization for Hispanic employees at AT&T committed to promoting the education of minority youth and children. Students meet with mentors regularly to socialize or to focus on academic and professional activities, such as visiting the mentor's office, doing school work, or filling out college applications.

California Partnership Academies

The California Partnership Academies Program represents a three-way partnership among the state, local school districts, and supporting businesses. Grants from the state are matched by direct or in-kind support from the participating business and school district to set up an academy. Goals are to provide academic and vocational training to disadvantaged students and to decrease youth unemployment.

Participation in the program is voluntary. To qualify, students whose past records put them at risk of failing or dropping out of school must show that they "want to turn themselves around" (Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition, 1990). Students apply and are interviewed in the second semester of 9th grade. Academy staff (teachers, administrators, counselors) and representatives from the participating business then meet with parents of applicants to explain the goals of the program, answer questions, address concerns, and get permission for the students to participate. Selected students enter the program in the first semester of 10th grade.

Partnership Academies function as a school within a school (Dayton & Stern, 1990). Through block scheduling, students enroll as a group in one technical class (designed with the collaborating business) and three academic classes (English, math, and social studies or science). Students spend the morning in their vocational/technical and academic courses then join the rest of the student body in the afternoon for extracurricular activities (Raby, 1990). Teachers invite outside speakers to share information on career selection, employment skills, and the importance of getting an education.

In 11th grade, each Academy student is matched with a mentor from the business community, who serves as a role model and offers guidance and information on succeeding in the workforce. In the summer following 11th grade, Academy students in good academic standing are given jobs with the participating business, with the goal of improving their employment skills and increasing their chances for gainful employment after graduation.

Other aspects of the program are student recognition (awards for student of the month, excellent attendance, and academic and personal achievement) and parental involvement, sought through questionnaires to parents regarding meeting and workshop topics, invitations to accompany students on field trips, a newsletter, and constant personal contact with Academy staff.

California Partnership Academies have had a positive effect on participating students. They report that being able to see the connection between an education and work makes school more interesting. As one student reported, "I'm 18 and I've had three jobs—all of them at major companies. I've never tossed a fry or slapped a burger, and thanks to the Academies I won't have to" (Raby, 1990). The goal is for 94% of Academy students to focus on long-range plans, such as continuing their education, pursuing careers, or both.

Conclusion

Dropping out of school results from many complex factors and long-term individual experiences (OERI, 1993). Successful dropout prevention programs for language minority students, like those described here, must have the following components: respect for the language and cultural backgrounds of the students they serve and for the positive qualities students bring to school; the possibility of long-term involvement, from middle school through high school; a well-designed academic curriculum, developed by committed and experienced professionals who facilitate movement through the program and provide assistance in pursuing academic opportunities beyond high school; substantive work experience that promotes mature choices and access to high-quality jobs; a tutoring and mentoring component that provides intense personal attention and encouragement from successful and caring role models; and family and community involvement. For language minority students, programs must also include appropriate components for native language support and English language development.

Dropout prevention demands attention from school and district staff in collaboration with local businesses, community colleges and universities, community-based organizations, and policymakers for any lasting impact to be made on reducing dropout rates among the nation's language minority students.

Program Contacts

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Coca Cola Valued Youth Program: Linda Cantu, IDRA, 5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, TX 78228.
California Partnership Academies: Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition, 430 Sherman Avenue, Suite 305, Palo Alto, CA 94303.

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This article is the first in a series to be produced by the Program in Immigrant Education, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through a grant to the Center for Applied Linguistics.

This report was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education, under contract no. RR93002010. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED or of the Mellon Foundation.